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ABSTRACT

Based on the assumption that something is fundamentally wrong at its definitional roots about the concept of adult education upon which the profession is organized, this paper identifies seven troubling characteristics of the profession. These characteristics, which stem from failure to root the definition in philosophical foundations, are (1) the claim that adult education preexists its formation as a profession; (2) use of an existing tacit definition of adult education; (3) giving power to third parties with roots outside the profession; (4) loss of social ethics; (5) loss of focus on the person and failure to achieve universality; (6) continuing use of the terms of children's education; and (7) explanations and theories that become ideological and distanced from the concept of education. It then offers a theory to account for these characteristics and describes a design problem for the invention of a new concept of adult education. The paper suggests a definition of adult education as "self-education" as an appropriate response to the design problem, one on which a more substantial profession could be founded. (Author/KC)

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SELF-EDUCATION: THE FOUNDING OF ADULT EDUCATION--PART I

The first of two papers

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of the
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by

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SELF-EDUCATION: THE FOUNDING OF ADULT EDUCATION - PART I

Based on the assumption that something is fundamentally wrong at its definitional roots about the concept of adult education upon which our profession is organized, this paper identifies seven troubling characteristics of the profession, offers a theory to account for these characteristics, describes a design problem for the invention of a new concept of adult education, and suggests a definition of adult education as self-education as an appropriate response to this design problem, one on which a more substantial profession could be founded.

THE QUESTION OF DEFINITIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION

> Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills.
>
> (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982, p. 9)

> The term adult education denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level, and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges, and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications, or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the two-fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic, and cultural development....
>
> (UNESCO, 1977, p. 2, and cited in Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982, p. 9)

> Adult education is each and every adult's intentional efforts at self-education, alone and with others, in all human situations, including occasions where the self-educator is officially facilitating the learning efforts of other self-educators.
>
> (Callender, 1987, p. 167)

Question: If these definitions are answers, what was the question?

INTRODUCTION

Something, it has seemed to me, is seriously wrong about the way the profession of adult education has conceived of itself. In an unpublished manuscript, The Adult Education Class, a kind of philosophical mystery novel, I have tried to figure out what could be wrong and to locate a firmer ground for our communal life together. In this first of two planned articles, I seek to name the foundational problem and describe its consequences, leading to the suggestion of a different definition of adult education. The second article, assuming the success of the first, will explicate

this new definition of adult education for the practitioner.

THE SOURCE PROBLEM HOLDING BACK ADULT EDUCATION

Let me begin with a set of context assumptions which I presume American adult eduucators will accept. The first is that Malcolm Knowles' The Modern Practice of Adult Education (1980) and Adult Education: Foundations of Practice (1982) authored by Gordon Darkenwald and Sharan Merriam, can be taken as representative texts describing the way American adult educators visualize their profession. I further assume that the corpus of adult education books published this decade by the Jossey-Bass and Krieger publishing houses and the corpus of articles published in the Adult Education Quarterly are compatible with the view of the profession provided by these two textbooks. Within this corpus, I also assume that two books on philosophy, Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education by Elias and Merriam (1980) and Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education (1984), edited by Sharan Merriam, are representative of the current standing of philosophy in adult education.

Taking these texts as cultural context, the root problem I see in developing a profession of adult education is their apparent exclusion of the issue of defining adult education from standing as a fundamental philosophical problem. In other words, some existing, pre-philosophical definition and meaning of adult education is already in place by which a professional calls herself an adult educator before the question is asked: "What is my philosophy of adult education?" Or again, by the time the adult educator represented in these texts first asks for help, assistance, or guidance from philosophy, adult education somehow already exists and has definition outside of philosophy; the requested help does not include defining adult education or forming the profession.

I do not advance this charge against particular thinkers; Lindeman (1961), Bergevin (1967), and Freire (1970), for three, are thinkers who can be said to have invented adult education within philosophy. Nor do I claim that the definitional problem as a problem of philosophy is unfamiliar to or unnoted by Knowles, Darkenwald, Elias, Merriam or the other culture-makers of modern adult education. For example, the Elias and Merriam text specifically notes that "even an attempt to define adult education presupposes philosophical questions" (pp. 5-6) and quotes approvingly from K.H. Lawson (1975), one British thinker, Paterson (1979) being another, to take on the definitional problem. In fact, if one reads Darkenwald and Merriam's Chapter 2., entitled "Philosophy and Adult Education," the impression is gained that the authors are familiar with all facets of the definitional problem.

Yet, when all of this material is summed up, for the burden of advice it offers to the professional, one finds that the culture of professional academic adult education excludes the definitional issue from foundational status. In the final analysis, these texts advocate relativism and bow to busy practitioners who are said to be already in the field and in need of practical insight. The modest aim of these books seems to be to encourage some appreciation of philosophy among practitioners, not to force them to recognize that it is problemmatic in what sense they gain the right to call themselves adult educators in the first place. The following language is typical of the cultural assumptions underpinning the relationship of philosophy and adult education:

> "The philosophy of education involves the systematic examination of the assumptions that underlie practice. How one analyzes and interprets practice depends upon the philosophical orientation one brings to the task. Just as adult education in the United States is characterized by a diversity of programs, sponsors, and clienteles, so, too, a wide range of thought characterizes the philosophy of adult education. There exists no single conceptual framework from which all educators view the field.
>
> "This diversity in both the theory and practice of adult education is not surprising. Institutions and movements and philosophies evolve from sociocultural contexts. While some argue that the adult education movement should have a single comprehensive philosophy....it is much more likely that adult education philosophy will continue to reflect our pluralistic society." (Darkenwald and Merriam, p. 35.)

This viewpoint is compatible with the advice Elias and Merriam offer in their summary of what they find to be six distinct types of philosophies of adult education, which they name "liberal," "Progressive," "Behaviorist," "Humanist," "Radical," and "Analytical Adult Education." That advice is in effect to accept one of the six as your own, be eclectic by using whichever one fits your needs at the time, or choose the one that most promises to help you evolve your own personal philosophy (pp. 205-206).

But what that attitude and advice does is tacitly accept a particular philosophy of adult education and award it hegemony over other philosophies and the doing of philosophy. In what appears to be a kind of progressive humanism, the authors encourage the reader to think that philosophies are like varieties of quality cereal, sitting on a shelf, to be selected among as the need and mood strikes. The practitioners, busy already doing important work, are given standing as a sociological phenomenon — a social movement — and are granted the claim to be 'really' doing adult education before and without philosophy; the problem therefore becomes to interest these busy people in the potential usefulness of these several quality 'cereals'. Thus nurtured, they will be well-positioned to improve their already established practice. This view of philosophy appropriates philosophy but is itself unphilosophical. Indeed, as the Darkenwald and Merriam quote reveals, philosophy is said to be essentially a social-historical phenomenon, a phenomenon for social science. Philosophy is disempowered from its function of the thinking-through of all thought. The failure of philosophy to find unity in its search for unity is granted permament sociological status.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PROFESSION

What are the consequences for a profession of adult education of leaving the founding definition of adult education out of the philosophical equation.

First, it commits the profession to the claim that adult education pre-exists its own formation as a profession. Consider the implications of this quotation by Malcolm Knowles, addressing the question: "Who is an Adult Educator?"

> "Many more people are adult educators than know they are. If 'adult educator' is defined as one who has some responsibility for helping adults to learn, look at how many people in this country are entitled to bear this hallmark:
>
> Hundreds of thousands of program chairmen, education chairmen, and discussion leaders in such voluntary associations as women's clubs, service organizations, religious laymen's organizations, PTA's, professional societies, civic clubs, labor unions, trade associations, farmers'associations, and the like;
>
> Tens of thousands of executives, training officers, supervisors, and foremen in business and industry, government and social agencies;
>
> Thousands of teachers, administrators, and group leaders in such educational institutions as public schools, colleges and universities, libraries, and commercial schools;
>
> Hundreds of program directors, writers, and editors in the educational aspects of such mass media as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television;
>
> A few score full-time, professional adult educators who have been trained specifically for this vocation and who are making their permament career in it.
>
> But relatively few of this vast corps are conscious that they are performing the increasingly precisely defined role of 'adult educator.' Few of them are aware that there is a growing body of knowledge and techniques that they can learn to help them perform this role better .... The fact is, though, that to the extent that all of these assignments involve helping other people to become more competent, they have a common element - what we might call an adult-education component. And to this extent all the people carrying these kinds of assignments are partly adult educators." (p. 26)

As his words make clear, Knowles finds a role for a "few score full-time, professional adult educators" in educating what amounts to a mass of natural, unaware adult educators, in what's presumed to be a social movement, to better carry out their functions. I say presumed because what's being counted more accurately resembles a trend than a social movement. Afterall, the large mass of counted practitioners neither know each other or want to know each other; nor is there any apparent or latent shared political aim evident in their activities. But what Knowles

takes from the professional and gives away to the practitioner for the right to serve this social movement is the right to originate adult education. Natural practitioners, by convention, come to define what adult education really is and the historical social movement becomes the raison d'etre for founding a profession of adult education, whose role it then becomes to serve these natural adult educators. This stance is equivalent to chemists passing the definition of chemistry to alchemists, or astronomers founding themselves on the claims of astrology.

Second, the lack of an original definition of adult education commits professionals to an already existing tacit definition of adult education. If adult education is said to be extant out there as a historical entity before the invention of a profession of adult education, and that profession is said to tend to its development, then there is necessarily an already extant tacit definition of adult education which precedes efforts of this new profession to provide its own definition. A more dramatic way to make this point is to note that the sort of definitions which head this paper, which can be called formal definitions, are second rather than original definitions of adult education. These second, formal definitions do not so much critique or replace the original tacit definition as presume and accept its existence. Thus, in the Knowles' quote above, Knowles is noting the existence of a tacit definition in the words: "If an 'adult educator' is defined as someone who has responsibility for helping adults to learn."

In noting the existence of a 'first tacit definition' of adult education in a presumed social movement, a movement of people who as Knowles says may not be aware they are in it, we enter the domain of what might be called the obvious. I mean that the home of the tacit definition is in what is 'obvious to anybody.' What is obvious? Only this: that there are certain situations and occasions involving adults where learning is recognized as going on. There's the occasion, the adults, efforts of teaching and learning. That's adult education; everyone knows that. Thus, everyone knows with no help whatsoever from a profession of adult education that there are night schools, and correspondence classes and literacy classes and work skills training and that these

are 'adult education.'

Where this definition counts, as Knowles has shown us, is in who is admitted into the profession of adult education. The profession welcomes practically anyone who becomes consciously aware of what was earlier unnoticed by them, that they had been doing adult education unawares previously, when they were helping adults learn, a fact that once stated now is also obvious to them.

Examine the UNESCO and Darkenwald and Merriam definitions and note that their purpose is not to mark for professionals the exact time and moment of their becoming professional, but rather to deal in a sophisticated way with the typical problems practitioners face after they have entered the profession. Once one is an experienced practitioner, it becomes important in other ways what an adult is, or whether this learning occasion or that really counts as adult education, but these formal sophisticated definitions do not define the universe of adult education, that definition remains out there in naive popular sovereignty.

Therefore, my claim is that these second, formal definitions do not originate adult education, rather they address and smooth out political problems for practitioners who are self-consciously adult educators after having been granted standing as adult educators under an informal, tacit, but more original definition of the field.

Third, the inability to invent adult education inside philosophy passes power over the profession to third parties whose roots are outside the profession. As professional descriptors, adult educators often use such appellations as public school adult educator, university continuing educator, religious adult educator, armed services adult educator, training and development professional, labor adult educator, nursing educator and the like. Two points are important about these affiliations beyond the obvious one that they represent domains of specialized practice. The first is that these sub-types are not careful, logical, thought-through answers to the question:

"What are the desired sub-categories of adult education which follow from our formal conception of adult education?" In other words, they are not the equivalents in adult education of pediatrics, geriatrics, oncology, radiology, and the like in medicine or case work, group work, and community organization in social work or developmental, cognitive, social and clinical specialities in psychology. Second, they are not ways of being interested in the whole of adult education, as for example the sub-types of psychology or sociology are specialized ways of conducting scientific studies of the person or of society as wholes. Rather, these third party affiliations tend to name the exclusive interest and commitment of the practitioner; they are ways of being apart from one another when being together with other adult educators.

Beyond the fact that the sub-types of adult education have an imposed illogicality to them stemming from these third party affiliations, they also prevent any systemic social analysis, implying as they do that the practitioner has already completed the relevant societal analysis before entrance into the profession. This pre-sworn and thus prevented analysis represents a huge loss of professional power; the outside world has as it were already placed its imprint on the shape of adult education.

A fourth consequence, which directly follows from the power differential described above and from the failure of the profession to invent its definition of itself, is the loss of social ethics. The profession of adult education can have no authentic ethics because ethics is effectively given away as a kind of door prize in the process of entering the profession. If people are pre-declared to be adult educators solely on the grounds that they as adults have been facilitating other adults' learning in any situation - governmental, economic, military, religious, familial, or otherwise. - then we are saying that ethics do not count insofar as defining adult education is concerned. While the individual practitioner may be personally concerned with ethics, and indeed adult educators as persons are both as ethical and as concerned with ethics as any professional group, grounds are absent for ethical analysis and choice within the profession and

as a profession.

Take as a dramatic test case how the professional literature would have instructed you if you had been head of Munich adult education in the 1920's in the event that one A. Hitler enthusiastically sought your facilitation of two self-directed learning projects, one to write his biography, tentatively entitled Mein Kampf, and the other to develop a plan for the military conquest of Europe. Does not our literature essentially ask for a self-motivated, take-charge, self-directing learner? What grounds would we have for an ethical stance toward the content of learning or toward a learner's evil intent? Our attitude tends to be: learning is good for you and it doesn't matter what kind. We will facilitate any type of adult learning if you are adult enough to be self-directing. And perhaps this should be our stance. I do not argue against it. My point is only that our professional ethics are silent on the question.

Or, returning to where this discussion began, probably the religious adult educator in this situation will impose religious ethics, the military educator military ethics, the trainer in business corporate ethics, the labor educator labor ethics, the radical adult educator critical ethics, and whatever other ethics the practitioner personally holds, but no ethical judgment follows from the fact that one is an adult educator.

Fifth, the profession loses its focus on the person and finds it difficult to achieve universality.

Since the values adult education practitioners care about are represented more strongly by the particular adjective for their specialist practice - military, religious, public school, university, business, literacy, corrections, community development, etc. - than by the noun phrase 'adult education,' it becomes difficult to achieve universality in the profession — that is a sense of profession that includes 'all' adults, holds a life-span view of the person, and interests itself in the full storehouse of ideas and problems of the human experience and human nature. The

presumed fault, keep in mind, is the external domination of the profession by institutions outside of itself. To say the 'adjectives' hold sway is only to note that the world brings itself into adult education, each practitioner with her own pre-formed ethical and political affiliation. These affiliations are themselves signs of an ongoing moral war in the outside world which, undiscussed and unresolved within the profession, prevents unity and universality in regard to adult education.

One of the striking symbolic signs of the issue of universality is the prominent attention professional texts give to the question: "Who's an adult?" as if that were a question the reader held in compelling doubt. DarKenwald and Merriam (pp. 39-40) and Knowles (p. 24-25) both find this question important to answer early in their texts. What impresses the reader is not only the strange answers - "...behaves as an adult," "...performs adult roles," "whose self concept is that of an adult" (Knowles, p. 24) - but the importance of the question, which seems more often to be to exclude than include adults. Where the naive reader is expecting a universal appeal for educating all folks eighteen or over in the United States and anyone else in the world others are willing to accept as adult, the proferred definitions appear to offer standards for keeping some adults out of one's classroom, just as on the reverse side of the boundary criminal justice professionals now search for grounds to bring some children into court as adults. One wonders of the answers what were the real questions?

One of the most disturbing failures to achieve universality is the frequent omission of the adult educator as an adult learner. Adult Education is represented as a profession in which an educator does something - teaches, trains, instructs, counsels, plans, administers, researches, facilitates, evaluates the learning of other people, 'the learners.' Yet, it is obvious that the 'educator' is also an adult and as needy of learning and education as other adults. Adult Education in fact seems to be a profession in which it would make uniquely good sense to advise "Physician, Heal Thyself." Teaching and facilitating the learning of others is afterall a special case of

personal learning, such learning being the means as well as the precondition for teaching others. While professionals in medicine, psychiatry, nursing, sociology, psychology, law, and social work would all be arguably worse and indeed failed professionals if they were to take themselves as a client, adult educators can only be expected to be good for others if they are able to be self-educating themselves. But, where one might expect an early enticement into practice, such as "you're an adult, you're a learner, you're the first client of this profession," the texts remain quiet on the inclusion of the practitioner in or as the universe of adults to whom it ministers, except of course in the expectation that practitioners attend to their own professional development needs. Despite plaudits to co-inquiry and communities of learners, adult educators seem to think of the professional-client relationship as other professionals do, as what a knowing professional does with and for a less knowing client.

And where in adult education's accounts of itself is there a concerted and consistent view of human nature, of what it is to be human, and of how a human life is lived? If public school adult educators are providing "basic education" and "diploma education," while others are providing "continuing education" and "professional education" and "training and development," and still others "lifelong learning" and "distance education," side-by-side with "correctional education," "self-directed learning," "worker education," "human resource development," and "displaced worker education," what model of human life is being professed and extended? What view of life holds all of that together?

Finally, one might expect a direct affiliation with the humanities from a community of professionals who wish to form adult education. Why isn't there a primary concern with the problems of the human condition: pestilence and war and hunger and love and death and evil and fear and injustice and servitude and the diseases of will and the glories of imagination and hope? Why isn't Shakespeare central to adult education? Why isn't our vision Ulyssean? Why have we moved away from the ancient search for self-knowledge? Why isn't adult education a vision of the

heroic person seeking through learning to overcome self in and as society? By what philosophical invention of adult education does it make more sense to affiliate the profession with the social sciences than with the humanities?

Sixth, the continuing domination of adult education by the terms of children's education. Since adult education is founded on a tacit, pre-philosophical definition of itself, introduced into the profession uncritically by more powerful societal agents, the meaning of the key word 'education' is itself inherited, presumedly from its meanings about children. Thus, the three formal definitions of adult education which head this paper appropriate and use rather than invent or define the word education. Even if adult education had never been founded, either as social movement or profession, the word education would still exist with all its rich meanings, because the term has full reference to the bringing up of children.

The same claim can be made about virtually all of the key words in what makes up the language of education. When key words in educational talk are heaped into a kind of word dump -- words such as 'learning,' 'teaching,' 'program,' 'curriculum,' 'instruction,' 'student,' 'teacher,' 'school,' 'degree,' 'test,' 'training,' 'literacy,' 'classroom,' 'development,' 'diploma,' 'elementary', 'secondary,' 'higher,' 'professional,' and 'continuing education,' and hundreds of like words and usages — it becomes evident that all of this is inherited in the assumptive world of adult education from the world of children's education.

One consequence is that the adjective 'adult' modifys education in no different way than the words 'special', 'primary,' 'early,' 'pre-school' 'vocational,' 'elementary,' 'secondary, or 'higher' modify 'education;' no different meaning of the word education is meant. (Paterson, pp. 3 - 35) (Lawson, pp. 45 - 54) While there are a range of meanings, many vague, in use for the word education in all of these forms, 'adult' simply refers to the age status of the learner, as 'early childhood education' or 'adolescent education' refer to the age status of other learners. It even

can be argued that the use of the particular adjective 'adult' confuses the matter. Isn't it an oxymoron? Doesn't it introduce one too many meanings of the word 'adult' into the equation? 'Education' already contains within itself the exact purpose of bringing the child to adulthood through learning processes. The very aim and purpose of education is the achievement of adulthood. Are we to translate 'adult education' as "adults attaining adulthood through learning?" Not bad, you might say, but certainly confusing.

A second consequence, one which we have already seen, is the illogicality and fragmentation of adult education 'specialties.' Because 'adult education' is a sup-part of a universe of talk about children, and has no original definition of its own, so-called sub-types of 'adult education' becomes explainable only within the history of the education of children. I find it possible to break sub-type names into three categories: A. types of programs for adults who were failed by the schools as children (basic adult education, literacy education, vocational adult education, high school completion, corrections education, alternative education); B. types of programs for adults who succeeded in school as children (continuing education, professional education, training and development, human resource development, elderhostel, staff development, executive education, leisure education); and C. types of programs which would reform education, starting in childhood (lifelong learning, self-directed learning, permament education, recurrent education, etc.) The remaining types are either auxiliary to one or more of these three categories (health education, substance abuse education, second language education, displaced homemaker education) or, if not related, would exist as education even if adult education had never been established as a profession (libraries, museums, The Extension Service). This shows that adult education is a trapped profession, whose specialty categories are controlled by the history of child education.

Finally, we can now see that what I have called the first, tacit definition of adult education, while simple and obvious to the person on the street, is not really obvious; it is neither

emperically necessary or compellingly logical. In the same way that red, green, and yellow lights can, once learned, be obeyed thoughtlessly and seem obvious, although sophisticated social legislation in fact had to be passed to make this 'obviousness' possible, so "there's an adult helping another adult learn - that's adult education" can become obvious only within the context of a huge pre-existing culture of educational assumptions having their roots in childhood.

Seven, professional explanations and theories of adult education become inevitably ideological and move away from the concept of education Since masses of people are supposed to be already in adult education under a tacit, predefined, and pre-philosophical definition of adult education, the profession forming activities of professionals tend to be guided by the problem of 'making sense' of this multitude of supposed practitioners. The profession creator starts with the presumption that adult education exists 'out there,' that 'those people working with adults in situations where learning is consciously going on are adult educators,' and therefore, that the problem is to develop definitions, concepts, and models which furnish a pleasing, useful, and reasonable account of who this hoarde is, what they are doing together, why their activities are important, and what their work achieves.

Once the problem is put that way, any answer must be ideological because the task is ideological, namely to design an umbrella tent to set over the carnival. Since all of this adult learning activity is adult education, it must be more than a 'trend, namely a 'social movement;' since the practitioners don't know each other and the situations of 'practice' are so divergent, the objects of practice must all be 'adult learners;' since these 'adult learners' received education as children to prepare them for adulthood, they must still be in 'developmental roles' but now seeking 'competence' for current 'adult roles;' since many of these learners are semi-conscripts (corporate trainees, prison inmates, professionals maintaining certification, unemployed people being retrained), their skills and attitudes must be fundamentally in danger of 'obsolescence;' if these semi-conscripts resist learning, they aren't 'ready,' 'mature,' or sufficiently 'adult'; if many (or

all?) institutions offer adult education services, and some 'learners' are semi-conscripts, then 'we' must have a tri-partite 'mission:' to serve 'persons,' 'groups'/'institutions,' and 'nations'/'societies;' if some of these nations are totalitarian, there is still a role for 'us' in developing good 'citizens', aiding 'development' and producing 'change agents' - besides 'progress' is being made; if the philosophies and models practitioners use are divergent, that is because we live in a 'democratic', 'pluralistic,' or 'global society' and, if due to these ideological snowshoes 'knowledge' doesn't advance very quickly, it is because our profession is so 'new.'

In addition to these 'sorts' of ideas, which are pernicious precisely because they are so plausible, attaching as they do our profession to important values from the last three centuries, the most 'destructive' ideological trick is to overlay all this language with the idea that we do 'science', as well as 'art.' This claim solves the problem of avoiding a clash between the multitudes of ethical stances underlying 'practice' in competing domains (church versus military, for example), while gaining the right to do objective studies of what is common: adult learners; program auspices; needs assessments; program development; facilitation and teaching techniques; evaluation models and the like. In this value-loaded way, professionals can claim to be value-free. Objectivity can be said in good conscience to produce important knowledge while disattending exactly what the practitioners under the umbrella are most like to fight about, the subject matter content being taught and the theory of the world under which that content is claimed to have value. Besides, it can be claimed that content is the 'adult learners' choice as 'self-directing' persons: it's their business, not ours.

In the end, an ideologically driven profession of adult education must fail in human terms because it moves away from the very idea of education. Education, while having diverse, elusive meaning, is fundamentally a learning process whereby the learner comes to adulthood through the exercise of judgment and personal understanding. Yet, Knowles has been able to find three missions for adult education - the "needs and goals of individuals," the "needs and goals of

institutions," and the "needs and goals of society" (pp. 24-39); Boyd and Apps (1980, p. 7) have been able to name three "client foci" for adult education - the "person," "group," and "community;" and Houle has been able to find four types of program design audiences - the "individual," "group," "institution," and "mass audience." (1982, p. 44) In any classic meaning of education, only the first client audience is the owner of education, all the others are indirect beneficiaries. Only persons can be educated and through education groups, institutions, and societies benefit. The willingness to actually make these other audiences coequal with the person indicates the extent to which adult education has moved away from being education.

As for that other popular idea in adult education theory, 'andragogy,' by whose tenets I admit a wish to be treated in my institutional learning activities, it too is an essentially ideological, rather than an emperically or logically necessary idea. A fair test of the age-relatedness of the andragogy-pedagogy distinction would be to take a vote of children to see if they would choose pedagogy over andragogy any more frequently than adults do. If there were no significant differences in voting percentages between children and adults, we would do well to assume that it is adults who invent both pedagogy and andragogy, the first for their children and the second for themselves. In short, the so-called association of andragogy with adults and pedagogy with children is mostly a matter of an unequally played age politics.

THE ANSWER OF DEFINITIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION

Three definitions of adult education were presented at the beginning of this paper with an attached question: "If these are answers, what was the question?" We have seen that none of the three is the first definition of adult education known in society. In regard to the person on the street, we found an already extant tacit definition consisting in the understanding that 'adult education' describes situations where adults are consciously engaged in learning activities. This commonsense view precedes the act of forming a profession. Thus, the question couldn't have

been: how are we to establish an original idea of something, which upon reflection, we had best call adult education?

Nor does the question seem to be: how will we get practitioners who are doing adult education by this tacit definition to realize that they are practitioners and potential professionals? While Knowles is quite right that most of the people who know the tacit definition of adult education do not thereby identify themselves as adult educators, the important fact to consider here is that **some do!** Thus, there are pre-professional professionals, people who recognize themselves as adult educators in practice before any profession of adult education is known to or formed for them. Such persons say to themselves, in effect, that "they work with adults in situations where learning is going on." That's adult education." "I'm an adult educator!" Thus, no new definition is needed from professionals to create the existence of the practitioner role.

If the three definitions do not answer either the question of adult education's first meaning or of practitioner role identity, then what do they answer? Here, I wish to offer a hypothesis about the Darkenwald and Merriam and UNESCO definitions, and contrast that answer with the question my definition is intended to answer.

Hypothesis about Professional Definitions of Adult Education:

The hypothesis is that these two definitions and most of the other comparable definitions in the adult education literature answer the question:

> What is the best rational solution to the host of issues practitioners face after consciously entering a profession named adult education?

This hypothesis suggests that when an official profession of adult education is formed, the 'practitioners' in the 'field' come to experience hosts of puzzling problems, which are eventually phrased as professional questions. If certain youngsters under the age of eighteen do well in our

programs, should they be considered adult for educational purposes despite their age? If certain people over the age of 18 don't do well in our programs, should they be barred from the status of 'adult' for our educational purposes? In other words, are all legal adults adult for the purposes of an educational program? What should we think about the fact that adulthood has different definitions in different societies? If the adults involved have no say in what they are taught, is that education? Is mandatory training adult education? If a program is for the primary benefit of an organization or community, rather than for the individual, is that adult education? Is adult education more of the same thing as experienced in high school or college, or is it different? Is adult education a process of working with adults or can it be a program, organization, or institutional structure dedicated to the education of adults? Does it make any difference that the organization one works in does not have adult education as its primary purpose - a prison for example - or is it good enough that the job is education-related? Should adult education be restricted to the basic education of unfortunate, illiterate, poor, unemployed adults, or can it cover the wealthy person, the college graduate, the professional, the solitary scholar? Does this education we speak of have to be broad and liberal, or could it be skill and competency based? What about attitude training? What about values training? Is professional education adult education? Does one have to be a teacher or can an adult educator perform other roles? Can a person be an adult educator or adult learner without our knowing it? Is a poet an adult educator? Does someone in adult education have to do a lot of it, continuously over time, or will a little of it do? Can adult education be informal and unofficial? How does and should adult education be related to economic development and national ambition?

These are sophisticated questions! My claim is that it is these sophisticated types of questions which "second, formal definitions" generally address. Read the Darkenwald and Merriam and UNESCO definitions with such questions in mind and you will see the sophistication of their responses. Their definitions are likely to please because they satisfactorily address the kinds of

sophisticated questions practitioners have about their practice after considerable experience with 'it.'

But note - back to the big point - they do not tell the practitioner what the definition of 'it' was that they had in mind when they came 'into' the field! Nor do these formal definitions replace the first tacit definition, rather they assume 'it' and build on 'it.' Thus, these definitions do not philosophically found a profession of adult education. More often, indeed, they rationalize its dominant practices.

The results of this 'mistake' are mixed, and include not least the dramatic creation of this large, diverse, welcoming, exciting, growing, important profession we know as the AAACE. At the same time, that profession is, as I've shown, ideologically stuck, philosophically confused, value quiet, over-controlled by the history of children's education, somewhat anti-educational, politically weak, and academically marginal. In this paper, I have found it questionnable in what sense adult education is a field, a social movement, a science, an art, a discipline — even and especially a profession.

Designing the Question:

In order to invent adult education, the meaning of the term must be found within an examination of the historical meaning of the word 'education,' which is now buried and obscured within the uncritically accepted tacit definition of the term. Rather than assume and extend, one must face and penetrate the meaning of the word 'education' which adult has been used tacitly to modify. Without knowing what education is to mean, one can not know what 'adult' is going to mean. Thus, to define adult education requires first designing the design problem, that is the design of the "question" to which a definition of adult education, when given, would be an "answer."

To put the problem this way is itself liberating since it frees adults to design in unique and personal ways the problem 'of the world' to which adult education, if and when each invents it, would be a best solution. Thus, to have shown that there is this large universal, unsolved problem with the current definition of adult education gives no credibility whatsoever to my particular framing of the problem or designed solution in the form of a definition of adult education. These are my best thoughts in what seems like a new day, the reinvention of education.

One might at this point choose to state the design problem of reinventing adult education in ways that directly parallel the problems we have studied in this paper, by saying for example that what is needed is a universal, powerful, logical, ethical, respected, consulted, effective science and art of adult education. True enough.

Or one could draw out a series of particular design requirement in separate sentences:

- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, be universal, by including all adults?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, include all life situations and all social situations in which adults gather?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, count in the ethical choice of personal intentions and public actions?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, count as a powerful force in critiquing and informing public policies and organizational actions?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, allow practioners to bring a critique to bear upon their life affiliations and organizational commitments?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, clarify the sense in which adult education is an art, science, trend, field, discipline, and social movement?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, achieve the organizational clarity to be a powerful, independent, accumulative, disciplined science and art?
- By what concept of education would adult education, when invented, allow human beings to make and control their world rather than be made and controlled by it?

Or, if dense detail is not required to design the design problem, let me address my concerns

directly. We live in an age when the consequences of thinking as adults now do is destructive and potentially catastrophic. It is the 'educated' people who lead the world who are the worst 'learners.' Adult education must be re-invented so that it includes presidents, and premiers, and legislators, and executives, and garbage disposal companies, and researchers, and professors, and teachers, and planning boards, and other leaders as members of the universe of adult learners. These learners should be given paramount attention at the same time that we recommit ourselves to providing greater educational opportunities and services to the disadvantaged, the powerless, and the oppressed.

Or, clearer still, a properly reinvented profession of adult education is one where the day never comes when the world blows up or becomes uninhabitable at an hour when all adults are in school, each in their self-directed learning project of choice. That day is not unconceivable under the foundational terms of our current profession.

If that is taken to be the question, my answering definition is:

> Adult education is each and every adult's intentional efforts
> at self-education, alone and with others, in all human situations,
> including occasions where the self-educator is officially
> facilitating the learning efforts of other self-educators.

My claim is that there is no more important profession to invent than adult education: because everyone who is not a child is adult, because adult life is learning, or else habit-forming and dead-certain, because adults are the potential destroyers or nurturers of life on this planet, and because the outcome for life on this planet lies in the balance.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that the current framework in which definitions of adult education are formally proposed is uncontrolled, illogical, and destructive of a substantial and disciplined profession of adult education. The paper hopefully has provided the reasons and

grounds for starting again.

In a companion paper, a sequel to this one, the reasoning behind the idea of adult education as self-education will be worked through in greater detail, both as an answer to the stated design problem and as a concept and method of practice. I can not claim that my approach is the only or the best answer to the problem of inventing adult education, only that it is the best one I've been able to think through. My hope is that these papers will serve as an invitation to other thinkers to powerfully reinvent what already is the indispensible profession of adult education.

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